

The Creative Potential

David Cohen's Seed Project

by Caitlin Legere



Seed Project art submissions from left to right, top to bottom by: Anne Lascari, Gabriella Lear, Annie Varnot, Clement Bagot, and Santiago Cal



There's a certain joy in the act of planting, joy in watching the progress of the seed as it emerges toward the light, and still more joy in the gratifying moment when it bears the desired flower and fruit. That so much can come from such small beginnings is ever-astounding. If you cultivate plants as a hobby, or if you haven't grown a plant since your mother's day project bean plant in the second grade, the guy who came up with The Seed Project wants you to grab some seeds and sew.

One time New Mexico resident and current New York City artist David Cohen just wanted to do something different. The idea for The Seed Project came out of Cohen's interest in connecting art and environmental sensitivity to creatively expose the connection between humans and their world. Simply by planting a seed the human who plants it is engaging in a creative act. By giving back to the planet and the greater green good while playing a hand in just how and where that creativity takes place, the "artist" now has an even more direct effect on the outcome. Well, that's the idea anyway, but what's really exciting to Cohen, is that his seed idea has blossomed into a fantastically fun, and positive global art project.

A main source for Cohen's inspiration was the creative environmental thinking of artist Joseph Beuys. Born in Germany in 1921, Beuys was one of 500 founding members of the Green Party, among other notable involvement in political and social change and modern art. Beuys' primary endeavor into "Social Sculpture", (Social Sculpture as defined by Beuys is the "way we mould and shape the world in which we live. Sculpture as an evolutionary process") the 7000 Oaks project, began in 1982 in Kassel, Germany. His goal was to plant seven thousand trees, beside each tree would be "planted" a columnar basalt stone approximately four feet high, in the city of Kassel. Though the

small oaks would grow, change, and move with the elements the stone beside them would remain relatively unchanged. Beuys wanted the idea of deliberate planting and the living art to continue throughout the world as part of a global mission to effect environmental and social change and also to create a more hospitable urban environment. Those who worked with him then continue his work and promote his ideas – the 7000 Oaks project has been continued in New York City along the entire block of 22nd Street from 10th to 11th avenues. Cohen says that Beuys' work showed him that everyone is an artist and has the power to change the world around them, and to him, the seed itself is metaphorically the idea, or creative pure potential.

Cohen began his work in "Social Sculpture" by planting wheat grass because it is nice and green and it will grow anywhere. "You can drop it on your carpet and it will grow", he said. Cohen wanted to invite people to create unique growing environments, not so much

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grass carpets, but close. Guerilla Gardeners (another urban based social/art movement) like to carry pockets full of seeds a la Johnny Appleseed, and plant them wherever there is a little room for soil, like a window ledge, a fence rail or a sidewalk crack. Cohen's Seed Project asks for just a little something extra – a photograph. After you've planted your organic basil seeds (sold on the website for a dollar a packet with the funds going to support the project's growing educational segment), or whatever your creative seed choice, into shoes, or broken incandescent light bulbs, or in the shape of a Celtic symbol on your porch, you tend them and watch them grow – and then – you capture them in an image. Send in the photograph of your plants to be a part of the global exhibit.

Cohen used the internet as a tool to base the project and to find artists, like those who work in collective (groups of artist making art along similar lines of inspiration), and asked if they would be interested in participating in the project. He got a return rate of approximately 10%. Cohen was pleased with the result, knowing it's a start, he says, "I think everyone should do it, but if everyone did things that were good ideas the world would be a lot better place already." People do regularly contribute to the site's growing collection and Cohen's project has artists' images from France, Holland, Germany, and a good deal of Europe, the US, Israel, South America and Japan.

Pre-dating The Seed Project, Cohen created a magazine called *Artworld Digest*, self proclaimed "Pre-eminent Art and Activism Resource" which he developed after being laid off from a good career with American Express' print division. He said the inspiration for the annual self-financed publication of "little word and much

image" was the hope of turning artists into environmentalists and environmentalists into artists. The Seed Project was a bridge, to get his ideas off of book shelves and circulation desks and into the hearts and hands of the people. Once a person contributes their seed art, they are part of the group, they can get connected to others ideas and others creativity and hopefully, the simple act of bringing people together with something to talk about will spark the kind of creative social setting to insight globally focused change in both small and larger scale ways.

Trying to make The Seed Project a non profit organization is at the top of the media dubbed "seed bomber's" list because Cohen wants more people involved – and no one more than kids, who in New York City, at least, have limited exposure to the great outdoors. Cohen takes The Seed Project into schools and engages kids with creative growing techniques by educating, and among other projects, creating planting "sculptures" from discarded soda bottles. He's encouraging kids to think differently, think natural and think about global impact and recycling. He works with kids from elementary through college levels expanding his artistic environmental activism all the while. Cohen seems well on the road to making his visions a reality, but folks who work for social and environmental change find it hard to call an end to the day's work. Joseph Beuys believed that it was possible to transform society through the creativity of every individual. Cohen is attempting to give us all the opportunity. To learn more about David Cohen and The Seed Project and to make your own seed art visit the-seed-project.org. 



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